The Old Native Circle

Napi Mephisto by Ron West, pages 108-11

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Napi explains to Spotted Buffalo what it had meant for a man to be in a matriarchal culture

Before the Christians, all of the male children were educated by the grandmothers to age ten. These were the women who inculcated the cultural values to everyone, it was the entire culture in the hands of these women. By this time of age ten the male children were exiled from women's society but already they were armed with lethal weapons and would lay down their lives for these women without hesitation. In fact they were the last line of defense between any attacking enemy and the women who were the seed stock of the nation, the repository of knowledge that determined everything it meant to be a Blackfoot. And it was not only the Blackfoot, but this was the case for most of the North American peoples.

You see this clearly in the Oral History. When the Blackfeet had effectively destroyed the Sarcee as a tribe, right down to wiping out the 'Mosquitos', the child warriors, all of the

male Sarcee beings had been killed. They became afraid of what they had done because no one has the right to destroy any expression of the Creation altogether. Our wise people counseled among themselves. If the Sarcee went extinct, this could be the Blackfeet fate as well. What had been done was of the most serious of wrongs. So the Sarcee women were given both protection and Blackfoot husbands, to reconstitute that tribe. And today the Sarcee people speak their own Athbascan language rather than Blackfoot. They still have their own Oral History and creation story. This is the result of the Women educating the male children. But they did have to adopt the Blackfeet 'Okan' ceremony to protect their new men, because these Blackfoot men had come from a different world, distinct from the Sarcee world, and that had to be recognized. And so the Sarcee nation went on and had survived.

The old Blackfoot world was divided between the women, the men, and the androgyny. What I mean by that is everything was ordered around the natural process observed in the world surrounding them. This order was and is, first and primarily feminine. This is reflected in the social order and the language. The oldest term for the highest possible chief is a Ninawaki. A Ninawaki is only a woman, never a man. In today's Blackfoot language the word is the shorter 'Ninaki' and means both Boss and Wife. This is the primary authority of the ancient Blackfoot world. And this idea goes to the cultural attitude of women as the disciplinarians: as in the very old Blackfoot proverb "The grandmothers carry the switch." The earth is a woman and women are the hosts. Men are the guests. This is reflected in today's Blackfoot world when a man has been thrown out of

his house by his wife and that is it. It is divorce. The man can do nothing more than state the fact of the matter as in the modern Blackfoot expression “She gave me the boot.” By cultural law, that act of eviction must be honored. So the men had to be careful not to disrespect their wives. They had to live honorably in relation to the governing female principles. The feminine aspect of the androgyny is reflected in the customs of marriage, the social organization and the language. And not least, in the men themselves.

The language is key to this understanding. There is what has been misunderstood by the western linguists as multiple genders but in fact this is nothing more than varying degrees of androgyny. Primary male gender is rare. You see this in the Trickster, a male clown or a man who behaves like an idiot, in the Sun, some of the sky gods, the Eagle perhaps on occasion, not much more. Primary female gender is more common than primary male gender but none the less, is the exception rather than the rule. Women themselves when single, or alone for instance out digging roots, the mothers with cubs, the woman chief Ninawaki, the wife Ninaki. However it is the androgyny which, in varying degrees, is the most common expression. Men are in nearly all cases androgynous, this is the vehicle for them to know what it means to live in Human Dignity. As warriors, you might expect the reverse to be true, but in this case they are actually more female than male, especially with the ritual paint as expressions of the matriarchal world they represent in war. All war is made on behalf of the women who nursed them for this role the first ten years of their lives. They were literally trained to think by and to think like, the women. The evidence is striking.

What the Whiteman could never see, and it was jumping out at him in the many photos of history, is in the feminine appearance of the men. Just take another look. These were not effeminate men, not at all in the western sense, yet they were very feminine men in personal expression that by and large were not in any sense gay. These native men were truly psychologically androgynous beings, a missed point altogether in Anthropology. It was simply a phenomena of Human culture that was beyond the framework of the western mentality. The Whites missed it altogether.

These were most typically heterosexual men of a feminine persona, high honor and a sense of feminine dignity that reflects in the frontier wisdom of the Whites: that it was by far smarter to simply kill an Indian, outright, rather than insult him. These people did not mess around, life is not a game. Rather life is an important opportunity to live a personal evolution of service to all that is holy, beginning with one's relationship to the Earth, the great mother.

Because the Whites could not see the source of the fundamental values inculcated in these people, that matriarchal principles underpinned a psychology with mental structures differing altogether from their own, they never saw how the Native government functioned. Rather they projected their own masculine psychological images on the native proceedings and came up with an utterly perverted interpretation.

The women's secret societies were in fact the crucible and drive in the Native evolutionary experience. They posed to the men the problems they wanted solved and told

them to get it done. When the men met and compared notes, it could not be missed when every son, husband and father with status and voice in the men's council had heard the identical message, individually, from the women. Having been devolved upon to take action to seek a means to an end the women had specified, the men discussed. The women had already had their say, they now only need witness what they had demanded be resolved, in actuality resolved. This was the primary means of problem solving in these cultures. The women identified what they wanted. The men were entrusted with bringing that desire to fruition. These women raised their men to be demigods, to be mental, ethical and physical Titans without fear. They did a good job of it.

That the women gave unselfishly, totally caring for these men, in return service to these amazing beings trained from infancy to lay their lives down without question for these women says everything. It was a circle, reciprocal.

This event was in fact totally invisible to the White men who could only see the superficial aspect of the men's public meeting and counseling and draw incorrect conclusions from this surface event, unaware of the inner dynamics these women had provided to devise and implement a brilliant system. But one only need look again at the photos of history, in the case of the Blackfoot, you see the men in the circle of ceremony seated beside their higher chiefs, their 'Sits Besides Them Wives', the "Ninawaki." How is it the wives are suddenly the highest form of chief, a "Ninawaki", rather than the mere boss of a man in family, a "Ninaki"? Because it had become the formal, proper word, a greater

context, in ceremony. Look at the photos. She is wearing a chief's bonnet. She 'sits beside him' as a matter of her place and privilege is granted by women, not men. He does not have much to say about that. And by gosh, he had better do right by her. Because her peers, all of the Ninawaki, determine his status among the men, just as much as these women had decided her right to be seated beside him. Now she has stepped up and cares for the Nation in the macro-cosmic sense of family. He is there because it is the men who are entrusted with carrying out that care and responsibility.

First, all life is meant to be ceremony. This is the formal circle of council. It is a macro-inclusive circle of the Blackfoot world, it is an expression of world view. The world is constantly in a state of flux, a kind of fluidity that must be coordinated with, in order to know a stable existence in community. In this original sense, all ceremony is calibration and recalibration. The so-called opening 'prayers' are the inclusive acknowledgment and employment of the quantum reality energy strings that tie everything, ourselves inclusive, essentially all the expression of our integrated surrounding existence and reality, together.

We are not to become separated in our own sight and intelligence from the greater intelligence of the mystery, the larger intelligent expression we know as reality. So this opening prayer is not a macro-cosmic communication in a local or finite sense, but a communication with a Gestalt expression in the Blackfoot world, one world of many intelligently expressed worlds which make up a greater cosmos. The Blackfoot family is a nucleus, that band's council, a cell, the Blackfoot branch or division is an organ, the

confederacy an organism. The mystery of our existing is a clockwork environment in which all must remain coordinated/calibrated to know a safe and intelligent experience. In this sense, the council is the Blackfoot world's great expression of what it means to know survival. And all survival depends on, from the beginning, what it means to live in Human Dignity for the individual males: to be Niitssitapi, which is a female rooted expression.

Without this sense of dignity which is actually an approach to life in relation to our surroundings, from the beginning, none of the expressions surrounding us will coordinate or make sense. Because all is related, all, everything, must be approached by these men in council with the greatest respect for this original law laid down for men to serve the women who represent the gift of our very lives. You must have LIVED this law, as in living personal ceremony, this will have in fact determined your seat determining law and status

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